

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**  
**Case File No.: AA-084290**  
**AK-040-03-EA-007**

Applicant: Anchorage Water & Wastewater Utility  
3000 Arctic Boulevard  
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Type of Action: Federal Land Policy and Management Act, Right-of-Way, 43 CFR 2870

Location: Seward Meridian, T. 14 N., R. 2 W., Section 11, NW¼

Prepared By: Rodney Huffman, Realty Specialist

Preparing Office: Bureau of Land Management  
Anchorage Field Office  
6881 Abbott Loop Road  
Anchorage, Alaska 99507

Date: January 23, 2003

I. INTRODUCTION:

A. Background:

In August 1977, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued a renewable lease for a period of twenty-five years, to the Municipality of Anchorage for the Eagle River Sanitary Sewerage Project Treatment Facility. BLM authorized the lease under the Recreation and Public Purposes Act, as amended (R&PP Act). The facility has been renamed the Eagle River Wastewater Treatment Facility (ERWTF) and is now operated by the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU).

BLM issued the lease for two parcels of land. The first parcel housed all the core facilities needed to process raw sewage. The BLM authorized the second parcel as a 30 foot Sewer Easement which included a strip of land 30 feet in width and 1,095 feet in length, that totaled about .75 acres. Within this easement AWWU built and currently maintains a 24-inch diameter sewer pipeline, which transports the raw sewage to the treatment facility.

On July 5, 2002, AWWU applied for a lease renewal for both parcels of land. In analyzing the application, the BLM determined that the sewer pipeline should not be authorized under the R&PP Act. Instead, the sewer pipeline can be more appropriately authorized as a right-of-way under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA).

The Corps of Engineers will need to issue a letter of non-objection on behalf of the Real Property Division of the Directorate of Public Works (DPW) on Fort Richardson, prior to BLM issuing a right-of-way.

B. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action:

The AWWU has applied for a right-of-way for the sewer pipeline in its current location. AWWU is seeking a right-of-way so that it will have the proper authorization in place to continue to operate the pipeline, which serves as a vital link in the system for treatment of wastewater from the communities of Eagle River and Chugiak.

C. Conformance with Land Use Plan:

The Proposed Action has been reviewed and found to be in compliance with the Southcentral Management Framework Plan (MFP), March 1980. Objective Number L-1 of the MFP states the BLM intends to "Satisfy state and local government needs as well as public and/or private demonstrated needs for land as they arise."

Additionally, this environmental analysis assesses the impacts of the Proposed Action and provides a basis for a decision on the proposal (43 CFR §1610.8(b)(1)).

D. Relationship to Statutes, Regulations, Policy, Plans and Other Environmental Analyses:

The authority to issue the right-of-way is Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

II. PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE

A. Proposed Action:

The Proposed Action is to continue maintenance and operation of the sewer pipeline in its current location. The right-of-way would be 30 feet wide, and 1,095 feet in length, and total about .75 acres. This right-of-way is only for the land occupied by the pipeline, that is adjacent to and immediately northeast of the lease boundary for the ERWTF. The right-of-way would be renewable at the end of a twenty-five year term.

The sewer pipeline is located immediately west of the community of Eagle River, on land withdrawn for the Fort Richardson Military Reservation, in the NW<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> of Section 11, T. 14 N., R. 2 W., Seward Meridian. See the Aerial View and Description.

B. No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would be to deny the right-of-way. Under this alternative AWWU would be required to remove their sewer pipeline from the land and rehabilitate the site.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

A. Critical Elements:

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed and are either not present or will not be affected by the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative.

- Air Quality
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Cultural Resources/Paleontology
- Environmental Justice
- Farmlands (Prime or Unique)
- Flood plains
- Invasive Non-Native Species
- Native American Religious Concerns
- Subsistence
- Threatened and Endangered Species
- Wastes (Hazardous/Solid)
- Water Quality (Surface/Ground)
- Wetlands/Riparian Zones
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Wilderness

1. ANILCA Section 810 Clearance:

The Proposed Action and Alternative have been analyzed and determined to have no effect on any subsistence uses or needs under Section 810. The lands are withdrawn by Executive Order 8102 for a military reservation.

2. Cultural Resources:

The first archaeological evidence of people living in the Cook Inlet area occurs approximately 7000 to 9000 years ago. The people inhabiting the Anchorage area at the time of first recorded history were Tanaina. No Tanaina villages are known for Fort Richardson. The area encompassing Fort Richardson was undoubtedly used by the Tanaina for subsistence activities, especially the coastline and the salmon streams.

Beginning in the 1890's, Non-Native settlement of the general area was stimulated by the search for gold. In 1915, the Alaska Railroad reached Ship Creek and the town of Anchorage was platted. Some homesteads were situated within the area of Fort Richardson, but were acquired by the military when the land was withdrawn from public entry in 1939.

No cultural resources are known for the area of this project. Given the previous disturbance in the area of the project, no previously unknown cultural resources are expected for the area of potential effect.

3. Threatened and Endangered (T&E) Species Clearance:

The Proposed Action and Alternative were evaluated in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. The Proposed Action and Alternative were determined to have no effect on threatened and endangered plants and animals and their habitats. No consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) is necessary pursuant to Section 7 of the Act.

B. Land Status:

This land is under a withdrawal for a military reservation. BLM's role is to manage the vegetative and mineral resources. BLM issues land authorizations for this withdrawal, subject to the concurrence of the military.

C. Vegetation:

The project area is within the Cook Inlet/Susitna Lowlands major land resource area. During installation of the sewer pipeline, AWWU cleared the right-of-way. Since that time, vegetation has reseeded naturally. Climax vegetation would consist of paper birch, white spruce and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow brush.

D. Recreation:

The area of this project has limited recreation value as the land surrounding the sewer pipeline corridor is reserved for military purposes. The U.S. Army currently maintains an eight foot high fence which effectively blocks off access to the majority of the project area to the general public.

E. Wildlife:

The area surrounding the sewer pipeline supports a variety of animal species. Resident populations include moose, porcupine, snowshoe hare, microtine rodents and at least 40 species of resident and migrant land birds. Non-resident species that have been seen include fox, coyote, wolf, lynx, brown bear and black bear. Many migrant birds pass through the area during spring and fall migration, including several raptor and many neo-tropical species.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action:

1. Vegetation:

Under the Proposed Action, there will be no land clearing or removal of vegetation.

2. Visual Resources:

There are no visual impacts associated with allowing the existing sewer pipeline to remain. Existing screening will be maintained along the project area.

3. Wildlife:

No impacts to wildlife are expected, because no ground disturbance will take place as a result of the Proposed Action.

4. Socioeconomic:

By allowing AWWU to operate and maintain the sewer pipeline, the communities of Eagle River and Chugiak are assured of adequate transportation of their raw sewage to the ERWTF.

B. Impacts of the No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action Alternative, AWWU will be required to remove the sewer pipeline and rehabilitate the land.

1. Vegetation:

As a result of removal of the sewer pipeline, the project area would have to be contoured and reseeded with native grass species. Over time, additional vegetation would establish itself, which would result in climax vegetation that

would consist of paper birch, white spruce and cottonwoods, interspersed with thick patches of alder and willow brush.

2. Visual Resources:

During and immediately following the removal of the sewer pipeline many visual scars would be evident to the casual observer. As the area returns to a natural condition the casual observer may find the area more visually pleasing than in its current state.

3. Wildlife:

During and immediately after the removal of the sewer pipeline forage and cover would be decreased. Overtime forage and cover would increase.

4. Socioeconomic:

Under the No Action Alternative, AWWU would be required to remove the sewer pipeline, and rehabilitate the land. The cost for total rehabilitation of the project area is unknown. AWWU would need to find a new corridor to locate a new sewer pipeline. AWWU has not estimated the cost of locating the sewer pipeline in a new area, but new costs would be passed onto rate payers.

C. Cumulative Impacts:

The Proposed Action will support the pace of development that is taking place in the Eagle River and Chugiak Area. The Anchorage Bowl Comprehensive Plan (Anchorage 2020) foresees that these communities may grow by at least 66 percent within twenty years. Because of the location, existing screening at the site, and re-growth of vegetation along the project area the impacts on the surrounding communities are minimal.

V. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION:

A. Individuals and Agencies Consulted

Bill Quirk, Directorate of Public Works, USARAK  
Olaf Thorsen, Directorate of Public Works, USARAK  
Mike Rutherford, General Foreman, ERWTF  
Damien Stella, Project Contractor for AWWU

B. List of Preparers:

Debbie Blank, Botanist  
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